DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 366 497 RC 019 503

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TITLE Instructional Needs of Currently Migratory Students in the Central Migrant Stream.
PUB DATE 28 Feb 94
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Achievement Rating; Achievement Tests; *Educational Needs; *Educational Planning; Elementary School Students; Elementary Secondary Education; Hispanic Americans; Migrant Children; *Migrant Education; Needs Assessment; Secondary School Students; Whites
IDENTIFIERS *Texas Assessment of Academic Skills; United States (Central)

ABSTRACT

The 16 states of the central migrant stream provide education to a third of U.S. migrant children. In 14 of these states, most central stream students are currently migratory Hispanic elementary school children from Texas. States must identify the instructional needs of migrant children in order to target resources and services, but data on the skill levels and academic achievement of these children are frequently lacking. The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) tests provide an objective measure that can give reasonable direction to instructional planning by subject and grade level. Administered annually to about 1.2 million students in grades 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11, TAAS focuses on higher order thinking and problem-solving skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. Analysis of migrant student scores by grade and subject in relation to scores of Anglo White students suggests the following instructional planning strategies: (1) concentrating on language arts in grades K-3, as migrant math scores are comparatively strongest at this level; (2) dividing instructional efforts between reading and math in grades 4-6, as the greatest slump in scores occurs at this level; (3) conducting a massive remedial effort in reading and math in grades 7-8 to prevent dropout; and (4) focusing on mastery of basic arithmetic, introduction to algebra and geometry, and content-area reading and writing in grades 9-12. (SV)

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# INSTRUCTIONAL NEEDS OF CURRENTLY MIGRATORY STUDENTS IN THE CENTRAL MIGRANT STREAM

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# INSTRUCTIONAL NEEDS OF CURRENTLY MIGRATORY STUDENTS IN THE CENTRAL MIGRANT STREAM

by

**Mazin Heiderson & Marion Stiles**

The sixteen states of the Central Migrant Stream have a third of the migrant children in the country. Except for Kansas and Louisiana, most Central Stream students are Currently Migratory Hispanic elementary school children from Texas. According to the **Migrant Education Program Policy Manual**,[1] the SEA Needs Assessment should identify eligible students, determine the program focus by instructional area and grade level, select program participants based on service priorities, and target resources and services to meet identified needs.

**Central Migrant Stream States**

Planning for the Support Needs of migrant children is an easy task because it involves agreed upon activities and schedules such as providing meals to the children, medical and dental check-ups, and immunizations. But the Instructional Needs are another matter. What makes things even worse is that the data available to Central Stream states about academic achievement of migrant students is for the fewer students who are Formerly Migratory. National reports and studies provide only general information that is difficult to translate into subject and grade level objectives. **Invisible Children: A Portrait of Migrant Education in the United States** profiled migrant students as follows:

- a high proportion (84-94%) qualify for free or reduced lunch.
- over one-third are one or more grades behind their age-appropriate grade level.
- for approximately 40%, fluency in English interferes with classroom work.
- some have little or no exposure to formal education.
- over 40% are estimated to be achieving below the 35th percentile in reading.[2]

The much awaited **National Assessment of Chapter 1: Services to Migrant Children** described the instructional needs of migrant students in equally general terms:

> "Most of the Migrant children who are eligible for MEP services have substantial needs for compensatory instructional services. A large proportion of the children are limited English proficient (LEP), and many are one or more years behind their peers in school. Their teachers report these students' reading and language arts achievement is similar to that of nonmigrant children participating in the regular Chapter 1 program."[3]

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The **National Assessment of Chapter 1** concedes that "These and similar indicators of educational needs are easy to measure and categorize, but they do not completely capture the instructional and other problems these students face."[4] The report then went on to describe a host of possible causes and difficulties encounterd by migrant children from interrupted schooling, to poverty, to problems of detecting skill gaps missed years earlier.[5]

**Figure One**

**1991 CENTRAL MIGRANT STREAM STUDENTS BY MIGRANT STATUS[6]**

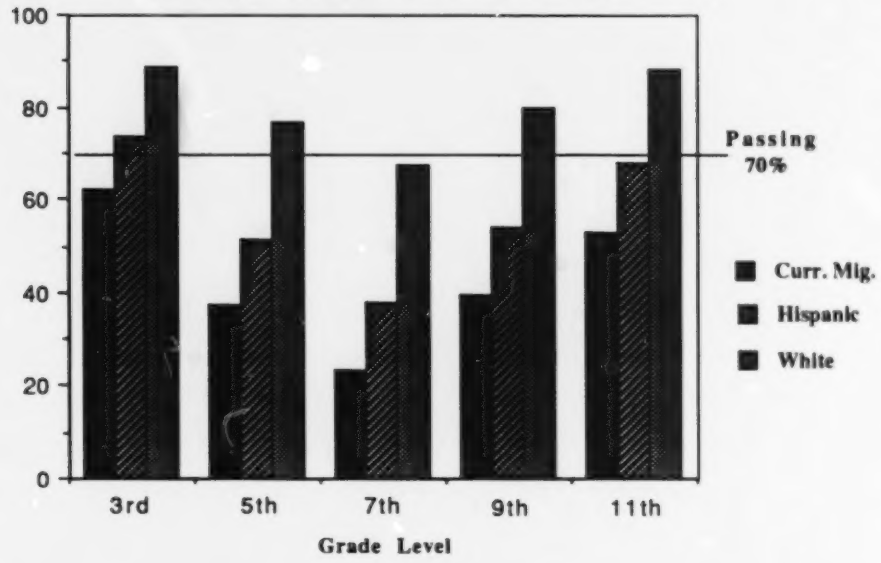
| STATE | MIGRANT STUDENTS | CURRENTLY MIGRATORY | PERCENT CURR. MIG. | FORMERLY MIGRATORY | PERCENT FORM. MIG. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Arkansas | 17,497 | 11,522 | 0.66 | 5,975 | 0.34 |
| Illinois | 3,103 | 1,658 | 0.53 | 1,445 | 0.47 |
| Indiana | 5,535 | 4,886 | 0.88 | 649 | 0.12 |
| Iowa | 1,384 | 1,216 | 0.88 | 168 | 0.12 |
| Kansas | 10,687 | 4,136 | 0.39 | 6,551 | 0.61 |
| Louisiana | 7,392 | 2,166 | 0.29 | 5,226 | 0.71 |
| Michigan | 25,165 | 17,085 | 0.68 | 8,080 | 0.32 |
| Minnesota | 5,612 | 5,092 | 0.91 | 520 | 0.09 |
| Missouri | 1,863 | 982 | 0.53 | 881 | 0.47 |
| Nebraska | 1,491 | 1,354 | 0.91 | 137 | 0.09 |
| North Dakota | 1,586 | 1,535 | 0.97 | 51 | 0.03 |
| Ohio | 5,939 | 5,309 | 0.89 | 630 | 0.11 |
| Oklahoma | 2,941 | 1,557 | 0.53 | 1,384 | 0.47 |
| South Dakota | 410 | 254 | 0.62 | 156 | 0.38 |
| Texas | 116,384 | 60,511 | 0.52 | 55,873 | 0.48 |
| Wisconsin | 2,598 | 2,235 | 0.86 | 363 | 0.14 |
| **TOTAL** | 209,587 | 121,498 | ---- | 88,089 | ---- |
| **AVERAGE** | 13,099 | 7,594 | 0.69 | 5,506 | 0.31 |
| **U.S.A.** | 628,150 | 298,471 | 0.48 | 329,679 | 0.52 |

With little time and diminishing resources, personnel from Central Stream states and local programs must quickly and efficiently focus their search for Instructional Needs to urgent areas. Fortunately, there is an objective measure that can narrow the search and provide reasonable direction by subject and grade level for Currently Migratory students in the Central Stream: the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) tests.

Implemented in 1990, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills is third in a series of statewide testing programs aimed at evaluating student achievement. TAAS focuses on higher order thinking and problem-solving skills in reading, writing and mathematics. Its predecessors, the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS), implemented in 1980, and the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS), implemented in 1985, measured minimum basic skills in reading, writing and math.[7]

## Figure Two

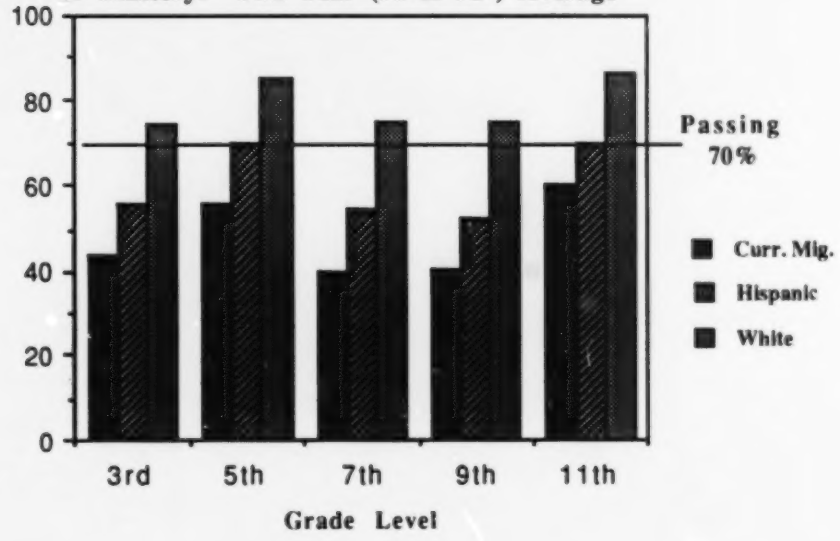
**TAAS Reading Results by Grade & Category**
**% Mastery: Two Year (91 & 92) Average**




Texas law mandates that high school students must pass all sections of a criterion-referenced exit level test to be eligible for a Texas high school diploma. At present, TAAS is the state testing program used to satisfy this high school graduation requirement. The test is administered annually to about 1.2 million students in grades 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11 in October; other testing times are added to accommodate retesting. To pass the test, a student must achieve a mastery score of 70% in each subject.[8]

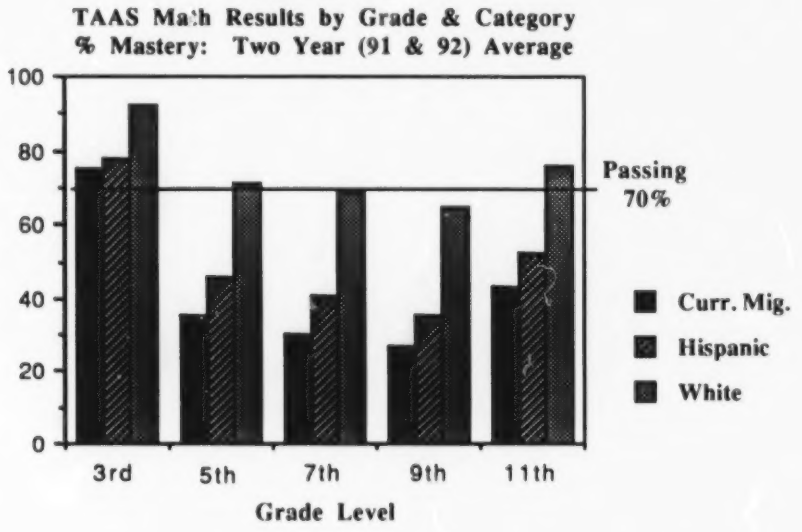
## Figure Three

**TAAS Writing Results by Grade & Category**
**% Mastery: Two Year (91 & 92 ) Average**



The TAAS reading test measures the ability of students to read for a specific purpose and to answer multiple-choice questions on information from selected reading passages. The writing test requires students to write an essay on a given topic and to answer multiple-choice questions related to the appropriate use of language in selected written passages. To demonstrate mastery, the essay must meet its goal of informing or persuading a target audience, use a consistent organizational strategy, exhibit control over written language and effectively develop the central idea of the composition. Student performance in math is assessed in three domains: concepts, operations

**Figure Four**




and problem-solving. Concepts include mathematical or algebraic relations and functions, geometric properties and relations, measurement concepts, and probability and statistics. Operations cover computational skills in addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Problem-solving includes the use of various methods and strategies to answer mathematical questions.[9]

The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills is a secure testing program established by Section 21.556 of the Texas Education Code. Everyone with access to test materials has the responsibility to maintain and preserve the security and confidential integrity of the test for fair and standardized administration. Test security involves accounting for all secure materials before, during and after test administration. Confidential integrity means protecting the contents of each test booklet and answer sheet from duplication and unauthorized viewing. Penalties for violation of test security range from a reprimand affixed to the face of all Texas Teacher Certificates and other educational credentials, to a one-year suspension of Texas educational credentials, to the permanent cancellation of all Texas educational credentials.[10]

Figures Two, Three and Four compare the performance of Currently Migratory students with Hispanics and whites by grade in Reading, Writing and Math.[11] What is clear from these graphs is that the scores shift up or down as a group with whites always occupying the top slot followed by Hispanics, then Currently Migratory students. It is evident that language and

culture (that is, being Hispanic) accounts for roughly half of the achievement gap between whites or Mainstream students, and Currently Migratory students. This is valuable information because it means that without becoming bilingual and bicultural in English mainstream culture, migrant students cannot hope to catch-up or even keep-up in school. The other solution is for the schools to operate in a culturally neutral mode, that is, by adopting an artificial academic culture that does not give one group a home-turf advantage over others. The common school language would remain English, but its true requirements would be explained and demonstrated enabling language and cultural minorities to master its elements. An example of this type of system is the military forces of the United States where minorities thrive and excel without compromising performance.

Figure Five shows the performance of Currently Migratory students over two years on TAAS by subject and grade level.[12] This data tells us how students are doing relative to this difficult criterion-referenced test on reading, writing and math. The only passing score is turned in by 3rd graders on the math test. However another kind of measure is needed, one that describes the performance of Currently Migratory students relative to Mainstream students. In other words, the TAAS test must be related to the classroom before it can help with instructional planning.

**Figure Five**

**Reading, Writing & Math TAAS Results (91 & 92 Average) for Currently Migratory Students by Subject & Grade**

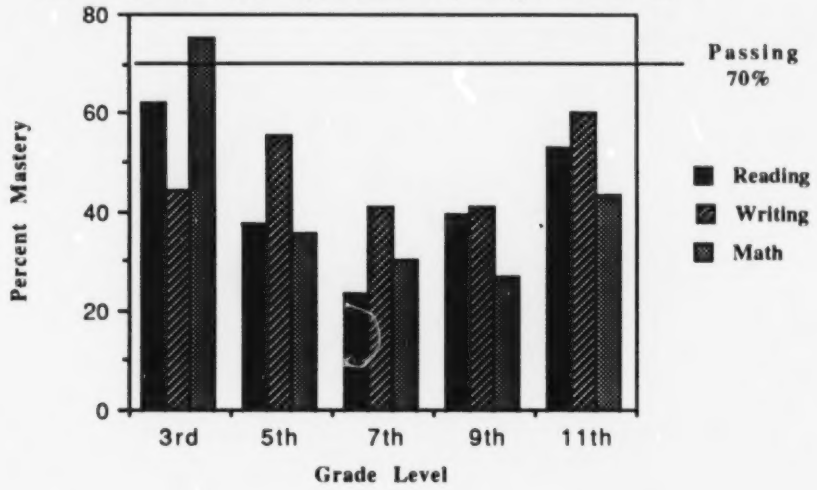
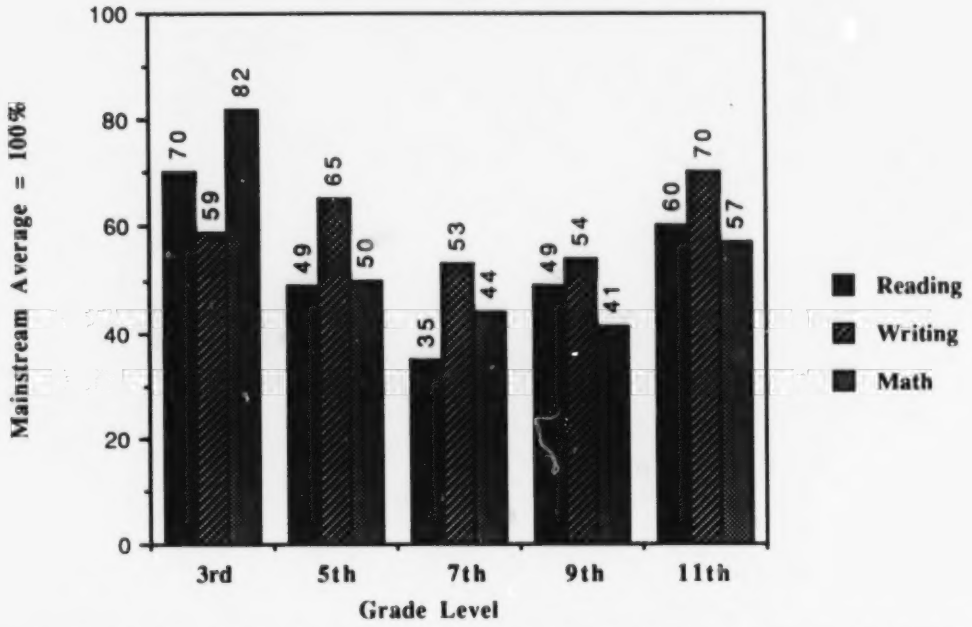



Figure Six provides classroom data useful for planning instructional programs by grade and subject.[13] Here, the standard is not a test that may or may not be related to the world of the school, rather it is the performance of Currently Migratory students as a percent of Mainstream student achievement on TAAS. White scores were used as a surrogate for Mainstream scores because the white students in Texas constitute 57% of the student population, and they are also the best performing group. This relative measure shows us the potential under the best conditions; the lower the percent achievement for Currently Migratory students in a subject and grade, the easier it should be to improve the performance of these students. The reason for this is simple: low performance in any field is easier to improve than exemplary performance. As performers climb the ladder of proficiency, they approach their potential under the system and it becomes ten times harder to improve their performance without changing the system. For example, high school

runners can shave their running time by minutes while olympic runners can only shave seconds or even fractions of a second.

**Figure Six**

**Currently Migratory Achievement by Subject & Grade**
**As a Percent of Mainstream Achievement**




Using this analysis, the following instructional planning strategies emerge as general priorities for Migrant Education programs in Central Stream states:

## Grades K-3

The instructional program should concentrate on Language Arts. Even though the potential for improving writing is greater than that for reading, it makes little sense to separate learning to read from learning to write. In fact, learning to write (encoding) is an excellent way to master learning to read (decoding). Math is a low instructional priority here because Currently Migratory students turn in their best math scores at this stage.

## Grades 4-6

The instructional program should divide its efforts between reading and math. The greatest drop or slump in scores occurs here. Special care should be taken to structure the math program and provide extra practice outside the regular school day, because unlike reading, math is sequential and cumulative. Once a student falls behind in math, it is very difficult to catch-up without direct instruction. Contrary to popular misconceptions, it is beween grades four and six that migrant students lose the ability to keep up with their mainstream peers and hence drop out of classroom instruction even if they remain in school.

## Grades 7 & 8

At this stage, migrant scores in reading and math reach their lowest point. Here, a massive remedial effort is called for in both subjects with a third priority for writing if the migrant students are to have a chance of staying in school. Care should be taken to ensure that instruction and drill in reading and math add to the knowledge of migrant students. Tools of learning remain feeble instruments if they are not used to learn new and more sophisticated things.

## Grades 9-12

Reading and math remain the instructional priorities with a slight edge towards math. Scores show a slow recovery for migrant students possibly because the weaker students have dropped out of school. Mastery of basic arithmetic and introduction to algebra and geometry should be the main thrust for math. Content area reading and writing should be the focus of the language arts component.

The above recommendations are offered as general priorities in the absence of better classroom diagnostic information. Diagnostic teaching is superior, but it is expensive in time and resources, and most migrant education programs are limited in these areas. Analysis of TAAS results saves time and money by narrowing the area of the search. The measurement is objective and it is more defensible than a hunch.

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[1] ***Migrant Education Program Policy Manual,*** *U.S. Department of Education, November 1991, pp. 13-19.*

[2] ***Invisible Children: A Portrait of Migrant Education in the United States,*** *National Commission on Migrant Education, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992, p.30.*

[3] *E. Strang, E. Carlson and M. Hoppe,* ***Services to Migrant Children: Supplementary Volume of the Final Report of the National Assessment of the Chapter 1 Program,*** *Westat, Inc., 1993, p. 19.*

[4] ***Ibid.***

[5] ***Ibid.,*** *pp. 19-21.*

[6] ***Invisible Children,*** *p. 158.*

[7] ***Statewide and Regional Results: TAAS Results, Volume 1,*** *Texas Education Agency, May 1991, p. 1.*

[8] ***Ibid.*** *p. 8-12.*

[9] ***Ibid.***

[10] ***Ibid.,*** *p. 14.*

[11] ***Statewide and Regional Results: TAAS Results Volume 1, Texas Education Agency,*** *May 1991 and December 1992.*

[12] ***Ibid.***

[13] ***Ibid.***